

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 11, 2004

Contact:

Eric Stucki

Utah State Parks

(801) 538-7429

News Release

UTAH STATE PARKS, HEALTH DEPARTMENTS WORK TO REDUCE ATV INJURIES AND DEATHS

Salt Lake City -- As thousands of Utahns head to the mountains and deserts on off-highway vehicles (OHVs) on Memorial Day Weekend, Utah State Parks and Utah Department of Health (UDOH) officials remind riders of the importance of education and helmet use.

UDOH data show that every year, an average of 12 people die and 4,000 are treated in emergency rooms for injuries suffered in OHV accidents. In 2002, nearly 1,600 Utah children were among those victims, and 207 victims were four years old and younger.

Eric Stucki, Utah State Parks off-highway vehicle education coordinator, says most of the accidents occur because operators overlook manufacturer specifications and Utah law.

OHV manufacturers specify vehicles are designed for one rider only. But all too often operators take friends or family members, sometimes taking up to two passengers at a time.

"More than one rider at a time is dangerous," said Stucki. "OHVs are not built for multiple riders because added weight shifts the overall center of gravity, making the machine more susceptible to tip or roll."

UDOH officials are especially concerned when young children are allowed to ride on or drive OHVs.

"Young children should never be allowed to ride or operate an OHV for any reason," said Cyndi Bemis, education coordinator for the UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program. "It is hard for parents to resist a child who's begging to go for a ride, but off-highway vehicles aren't toys, and they're very unsafe for children."

Utah law requires children ages eight to 16 to complete Utah State Parks and Recreation's *Know Before You Go!* OHV education course before operating on public lands, roads or trails. It is illegal for any child under age eight to operate an OHV on public land. While there is no law governing operation on private land, parents are strongly urged not to allow any child under age eight to operate or ride on an ATV.

Properly fastened helmets, having at least a U.S. Department of Transportation approved safety rating for motorized use, are required for all OHV operators and passengers under the age of 18.

"Despite the law, we see people riding ATVs without helmets all too often," commented Stucki. "A properly fitting, safety rated helmet is the most important piece of gear available to prevent injuries and save lives," stated Stucki.

Education classes play an important role in injury prevention by teaching young riders and their parents about safe riding, weight distribution, handling, shifting, speed, and riding within your ability. Volunteer OHV Instructor Fred Christensen lost a son in an OHV accident and now instructs and encourages all youth who operate OHVs to take a class and wear a helmet.

"I know that every time I teach an OHV education class, a life is saved. I just don't know whose," said Christensen.

Classes are available in several locations throughout Utah. *Know Before You Go!* education certificates are issued to youth riding OHVs and motorcycles. The curriculum includes information on safety, handling, maintenance and environmental ethics.

For more information, please contact the Utah State Parks and Recreation OHV Education office at 1-800-OHV-RIDE or visit www.stateparks.utah.gov.

#